

Protect yourself - May is skin cancer awareness month

Are you ready to enjoy the sunshine after the long dreary winter? Do you think you are doing all you can to protect your skin when you are out in the sun? You should think again. Most people fall short, miserably short, in reducing their risk of getting skin cancer, a new study from Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia claims.

Given that skin cancer rates have increased enough in the past 30 years to give it the dubious distinction of being the most common cancer in the United States, people might want to take more heed while basking in the sun's rays. Skin cancer is classified in three basic types, basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma.

In Kansas, it is estimated that 550 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed in 2008. Data is not collected on basal and squamous cell cancers. Nationally, the estimate is 67,720 new cases and an estimated 11,200 deaths from the disease.



Protect children from the harmful effect of sunburns and blistering through limited exposure and lots of sunscreen.

Skin cancer can be prevented. Using the following tips to protect your skin from the sun could decrease your chances of developing skin cancer later in life and help prevent wrinkles.

- Limit your exposure to the sun, especially midday between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Seek shady areas, and avoid direct sunlight.
- Wear protective clothing, including a wide-brimmed hat, a long-sleeved shirt, pants and sunglasses that block out ultraviolet rays. Dark, tightly woven clothes are best.
- Use a sunscreen every day, all year, even when it is cloudy. A sunscreen should block ultraviolet rays and have a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 to 30.
- Do not use a tanning bed, either at home or at a salon.
- Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going out into the sun and/or every 2 hours and re-apply after swimming.

One in five Americans including one in three Caucasians will develop skin cancer in the course of their lifetime. Children are especially vulnerable to the sun's damaging rays and one blistering sunburn in childhood more than doubles a person's chances of developing melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, later in life.

Most people know what they should do to reduce skin cancer risk – but they do not always put what they know into practice. Many also have to give up the idea that they look better with a little “tan.”

For more information, log onto www.cancerkansas.org .